

HEART AND CROSS.

**BY
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HEART AND CROSS.

CHAPTER I.

I KNOW no reason why I should begin my story of the fortunes of the Harleys by a description of my own son. Perhaps it is just because there is no reason whatever that I feel so much disposed to do it—also because the appearance of that son is the only difference that has come to my own life since last my unknown friends heard of me, and because there is quite an exhilaration in thinking that here is a new audience to whom I am at liberty to introduce the second Derwent Crofton. This story is not in the least about my boy, and, in consequence, it is quite an unusual delight to be able to drag him in head and shoulders. Women are not logical, as everybody knows.

My son, then, is, at the present writing, exactly seven years old. He is a little athlete—straight and strong. We have often explained to ourselves that it is in consequence of his having got over the baby period of existence sooner than most children do, that he is not quite so plump, as, for example, that red and white heir of the Sedgwicks, who has a succession of rosy cushions on all the points where there should be angles of his small frame. Derwent, I confess, has corners about him—but then what limbs! what color! what hard, consistent stuff the little rogue is made of! And I am not quite sure that I entirely approve of these fat children—not when they are past the baby-age. I will not delude myself, nor anybody else, into the idea that the boy is very clever. Truth to speak, he has not taken very kindly as yet to book-learning; but then does not everybody remember that it is the dunces who grow into great men? Neither is he in the slightest degree meditative or thoughtful, nor what you would call an interesting child. He has as many scars

upon him as a warrior, and has been bumped and bruised in all directions. At first the child's misfortunes somewhat alarmed me, but by this time I am hardened to their daily occurrence, and no longer grow pale when I am informed that Master Derwent has broken his head or got a bad fall. This peculiarity is one in which his father rather rejoices. I hear Mr. Crofton sometimes privately communicating to his especial friends the particulars of little Derwent's accidents: "He was certainly born to knock about the world, that boy of mine. Such a fellow was never intended to take peaceable possession of Hilfont, and settle down a calm country gentleman," says Derwent, with a chuckle. And even when once or twice in the child's life my husband's fears have been really excited about some misadventure greater than usual, there has always been visible to me a certain gleam of complacency and pride in his fear. For already he sees in the boy, whom I am half disposed to keep a baby as long as possible, a man—the heir of his own personal qualities as well as his land.

Little Derwent, however, has none of the sentimental qualities, which might be expected from an only child. He has indemnified himself in the oddest fashion for the want of those nursery friendships which sweeten the beginning of life. In the oddest fashion! I am almost ashamed to confess—I admit it with natural blushes and hesitation—that this little boy of ours is the most inveterate gossip that ever was born! Yes, there is no use disguising the fact, gossiping, plain, naked, and unsophisticated, is the special faculty of Derwent. He has all the natural childish thirst for a story, but he prefers to have his stories warm from the lips of the heroes and heroines of the same; and somehow everybody to whom he has access confides in the child. He goes through every corner of Hilfont, from cellar to attic, with his bold, quick step, and

his bright, curious eyes, interested about every individual under the roof. Too young to feel any of those sentiments which detract from the value of a sympathizer—without either the condescension of a superior or the self-comparison of an equal—I find nobody who is not pleased and comforted by the child's warm interest in their concerns; pleased and half amused as well—till, by habit, housekeeper and nurse, kitchenmaid and groom—for any efforts I might once have made to keep Derwent a proper little boy, circulating only in an orthodox round between the drawing-room and the nursery, have proved so totally fruitless, that I have given up the endeavor—repose a flattered but perfectly sincere confidence in their master's little son. Nor is the village at all stoical to his attractions. He drops in at all the cottages as if he were the curate or the parish doctor—asks questions about everything—never forgets any special circumstances which may happen to have been told him—knows all about the old women's marriages and the number of their children, and which one's son has been wild and 'listed, and which one's daughter is at service in Simonborough. He is ready for as many fairy tales as anybody will tell him; but nothing is so thoroughly interesting to Derwent as the people round about him and their homely lives. I began by being a little shocked at this propensity of his—then gradually grew amused at it—then tried my utmost to restrain that deep inquisitiveness which seemed inherent in him—and at last have come to accept it quietly as the child's peculiarity, a part of himself. If the best object for the study of mankind is man, Derwent will, perhaps, some day turn out a great philosopher. At present he is the most sincere and simple-minded of little gossips, pursuing his favorite branch of knowledge boldly, without any compunctions; such is the most distinct and remarkable characteristic of my son.

And only to imagine the difference which that pair of blue eyes has wrought in our great house and our calm life! My husband and I were, to be sure, “very happy,” as people say, before; as happy as two people can make each other, by a hearty and sincere love and cordial union; the climax of happiness we would have thought it, each in our separate thoughts, when we lived lonely lives apart. But love, which makes labor sweet and life pleasant, does not answer for daily bread—never does, let the romancers say what they will; no—not even to women. The heart within me was dissatisfied even with Derwent—I could not content myself with that life we lived—that calm, happy, tranquil life, which knew no burdens, and if it overflowed in courtesies and charities, which cost us nothing, was thought a model existence by our hard-working neighbors.

By dint of perpetual pin-pricks and unceasing agitation, I had managed to drive Derwent into Parliament, where he somewhat solaced me by his intense affliction and sufferings during the season of Parliamentary martyrdom, and was himself happier during the rest of the year in the relief of escaping that treadmill; but the content that had fluttered off from my heart, when I had only my husband and myself to think of, came with a flash of magic in the train of the little heir. All life glowed and brightened up with a different interest—there were no longer only ourselves who had attained all that was attainable in our own mature and settled existence; but this new living, loving creature, with all the possibilities of life burning upon his fresh horizon. The picture changed as if by enchantment; the master and mistress of that tranquil great house—lone, happy people set apart, none of the changes of life coming near them, living for themselves, changed into a father and mother, linked by sweet ties of succession to the

other generations of the world; belonging not to ourselves, but to the past and the future—to the coming age, which *he* should influence—to the former age, which had hailed *our* entrance as we hailed *his*. One cannot be content with the foot-breadth of human soil that supports one's own weight—one must thrust out one's hands before and behind. I felt that we fell into our due place in the world's generations, and laid hold upon the lineal chain of humanity when little Derwent went forth before us, trusted to our guidance—the next generation—the Future to us, as to the world.

CHAPTER II.

“I SUPPOSE, Clare,” said Mr. Crofton to me one morning at breakfast, “that Alice Harley has made up her mind, like somebody I once knew, to live for other people, and on no account to permit herself to be married—is it so?”

“I really cannot undertake to say whether she is like that person you once knew,” said I, somewhat demurely. I had some hopes that she was—I was much inclined to imagine that it was a youthful prepossession, of which, perhaps, she herself was unaware, that kept Alice Harley an unmarried woman; but of course I was not going to say so even to Derwent, who, with all his good qualities, was after all only a man. An unmarried woman!—that I should call my pretty Alice by that harsh, mature, common-place name! But I am sorry to say the appellation was quite a just one. She was nearer eight and twenty than eighteen, now-a-days; she had no love, no engagement, no sentimental gossip at all to be made about her. I will not undertake to say that she had not some ideas of another kind, with which I had but a very limited sympathy—but an unmarried woman Alice Harley was, and called herself—with (I thought) a little quiet secret interest, which she deeply resented any suspicion of, in Indian military affairs.

“Because,” said Derwent, with the old affectionate laugh, and glance of old love-triumph over his old wife, which he never outgrew or exhausted, “there is that very good fellow, our new Rector, would give his ears for such a wife—and from all I can see, would suit her famously; which, by the way, Clare, now that her mother is so dependent on her, is not what every man would. You

should say a good word for Reredos—it is your duty to look after your protégée’s establishment in life.”

I confess when Derwent said these words a great temptation came to me. It suddenly flashed upon my mind that Alice in the Rectory would be my nearest neighbor, and the most pleasant of possible companions. At the same moment, and in the light of that momentary selfish illumination, it also became suddenly visible to me that my dear girl had a great many notions which I rather disapproved of, and was rapidly confirming herself in that *rôle* of unmarried woman, which, having once rather taken to it myself, I knew the temptations of. Mr. Reredos was only about five years older than herself, good-looking, well-connected, with a tolerably good living, and a little fortune of his own. And how could I tell whether my private designs would ever come to anything? Derwent, simple-minded man, had not fallen on so potent an argument for many a day before.

“Mamma,” said little Derwent, who heard everything without listening, “the housekeeper at the Rectory has a son in the Guards—like the men in the steel-coats that you showed me when we went to London; the other sons are all comfortable, she says; but this one, when she speaks of *him*, she puts up her apron to her eyes. Mamma, I want to know if it is wicked to go for a soldier—Sally Yeoman’s son ’listed last year, and *she* puts up her apron to her eyes. Now, my cousin Bertie is in India—was it wicked in him to go for a soldier?—or what’s the good of people being sad when people ’list?—eh, mamma?”

“Did you ever see anybody sad about your cousin Bertie?” said I, with a sudden revulsion of feeling and the profoundest interest.

“N—no,” said little Derwent. He applied himself after that devoutly to his bread and jam—there was something not altogether assured in the sound of that “N—no.” Derwent could not help having quick eyes—but the child knew sometimes that it was best to hold his tongue.

“I should like to know,” said Derwent the elder, laughing, “why Mr. Reredos’s housekeeper’s son in the Guards has been dragged headlong into this consultation. Suppose you go for a soldier yourself, Derwie. There’s your drum in the corner. I have something to say to mamma.”

Little Derwent marched off, obedient, if not very willing. His inquisitive tendencies did not carry him beyond that rule of obedience which was the only restraint I put upon the boy. Derwent, elder, followed him with happy looks. He only came back to his subject after an interval of pleased and silent observation when there suddenly fell into the stillness of our cheerful breakfast-room the first thunder of Derwie’s drum.

“What an inquisitive little imp it is!” said Derwent; “but in spite of the housekeeper’s son in the Guards, I don’t think you could do a more charitable action, Clare, than to support Reredos’s suit to Alice Harley. Such a famous thing for both—and such an excellent neighbor for yourself.”

“That is very true,” said I; “but still I cannot help building something upon that son in the Guards.”

Mr. Crofton looked up somewhat puzzled, with a smile upon his lips. I daresay he asked, “What on earth do you mean?” somewhat exasperated at the repetition; but Derwie’s drum filled all the apartment at the moment, and of course I could not hear,

much less answer him. We had some further talk on the subject later, when Derwent called me into the library to read over that speech of his, which he made a few evenings before at Simonborough, and which the Editor of the Simonborough Chronicle had sent over in proof to ask if my husband would kindly glance over it and see if it was correct. Mr. Reredos was coming to dinner to meet the Harleys, among other people—and Mr. Crofton, always good-humored, and disposed to aid and abet all honest love affairs, could not sufficiently point out the advantages of such a connection to me.

And I said no more to perplex him, of the son in the Guards; but for myself remembered that mythical personage, whatever was said to me on the subject; and appreciated with the highest admiration that singularly delicate line of association which suggested the reference to little Derwie's mind and thoughts. Yes, to be sure! the old women will put up their aprons to their eyes when they talk about the son who has 'listed; the young women will keep a shadowy corner in their hearts for that unfortunate—and yet it is not wicked to go for a soldier. I felt Mr. Reredos's handsome figure quite blotted out by the suggestion conveyed in that of his housekeeper's son. When I had finished my housekeeping affairs, and given orders about the visitors we expected for Easter—this I should have said was the Easter recess, the glimpse of spring at Hilfont, which was all we could catch now that Derwent, to his great affliction, was a Parliament man—I took my seat in the great cheerful window of that room where we had breakfasted, and which overlooked half the country. Far away in the distance the sun caught the spires and roofs of Simonborough, with its cathedral faintly shining out from among the lower level of the housetops, and nearer at hand struck bright upon the slow and

timid river which wound through the fields down below us, at the bottom of this great broad slope of country, which had no pretensions to be a hill, though its advantage of altitude in our level district was greater than that of many an elevation twice or three times as high. Spring was stealing into the long drooping branches of those willows which marked the irregular line of the stream. Spring brightened with doubtful, wavering dewy smiles over all the surface of the country. I remember when I should have been glad to turn my eyes indoors, away from the sweet suggestions of Nature conveyed by that sweetest and most suggestive season; but I took the fullest and freest enjoyment of it now; rather, I sat at the window calmly pleased and unconscious, as we are when we are happy, feeling no contrast to wound me between the world without and the world within—and considered fully the circumstances of Alice Harley, and how I ought to forward, as Derwent said, my dear girl's establishment in life.

Now I have to confess that many years before this I had formed my own plans for Alice—had quite made up my mind, indeed, to a secret scheme of match-making in which at the moment I had been grievously disappointed. At that time, when little Derwie was undreamt of, and I had prematurely made up my mind to a childless life, I had settled my inheritance of Estcourt upon my young cousin Bertie Nugent, with a strong hope that the boy, who had known her for so many years, would naturally prefer my pretty Alice to all strangers, when his good fortune and affectionate heart put marriage into his head. This did not turn out the case, however. Bertie made his choice otherwise, was disappointed, and went off to India, where for eight long years he had remained. Sometimes, when he wrote to me, I found a message of good wishes to his old playmates at the very end of the page; once or twice it had

occurred to him to ask, "Is not Alice Harley married?" but the question seemed to proceed rather from surprise and curiosity than any tender interest. It is impossible to imagine a greater separation than there was between these two. Bertie, now Captain Herbert Nugent, at a remote station in the Bengal Presidency, where, scattered over that vast, arid country, he had friends, brothers, and cousins by the dozen; and Alice, with her new-fangled notions, and staid single-woman dignity, hid away in the depths of a quiet English home, where she addressed herself to her duty and the education of her little sisters and eschewed society. Whether any secret thoughts of each other lingered in their minds nobody of course could tell; but they certainly had not, except in my persistent thoughts, a single bond of external connection. So long as they were both unmarried, I could not help putting them together with an imagination which longed for the power of giving efficacy to its dreams; but nobody else had ever done so—there were thousands of miles of land and water dividing them—many long years, and most likely a world of dissimilar dispositions, experiences and thoughts.

While on the other hand Mr. Reredos was actually present on the scene, in a pretty Rectory just half a mile from my own house, and not a dozen miles from Mrs. Harley's cottage. The young clergyman lost no opportunity of doing his duty towards that lady, though her dwelling was certainly in another parish—and showed himself so far disposed towards Alice's new-fangled notions as to preach a sermon upon the changed position and new duties of Woman, on the occasion of her last visit to Hilfont. I trust it edified Alice, for it had rather a contrary effect upon myself, and filled the parishioners generally with the wildest amazement. Most people are flattered by such an adoption of their own opinions—and a

young woman aged twenty-seven, thinking herself very old, and trying hard to make every one else believe the same, is especially open to such a compliment. Besides, I could not say anything even to myself against Mr. Reredos. He was well-bred, well-looking, and well-dispositioned—the match would be particularly suitable in every way. Dr. Harley's daughter, had her father and his fortune survived till the present day, would still have made quite a sensible marriage in accepting the Rector of Hilfont. And then the advantage of having her so near!

I sat in the great window of the breakfast-room, looking over half the county. If I had been a woman of elevated mind or enlightened views, I should have been thinking of all the human wishes and disappointments that lay beneath my eyes, each one under its own roof and its own retirement. But, on the contrary, I observed nothing but a small figure on a small pony ascending the road from the village. In the same way I ought to have been benevolently glad that our excellent young Rector had inclined his eyes and heart towards my own favorite and friend—the friend and favorite now of so many years—and that a home so suitable, at once to her origin and her tastes, awaited the acceptance of Alice. But I was not glad—I sent my thoughts ever so far away to Bertie's bungalow, and felt aggrieved and disappointed for the boy who, alas! was a boy no longer, and most likely, instead of feeling aggrieved on his own account, would have nothing but his warmest congratulations to send when he heard of his old playmate's marriage. Things are very perverse and unmanageable in this world. The right people will not draw together, let one wish it ever so strongly, whereas the wrong people are always approaching each other in eccentric circles, eluding every obstacle which one can place in their way. I could not be very melancholy on the subject,

because the pony and its little rider came every moment nearer, and brightened the face of the earth to my eyes—but still it was in the highest degree provoking. If it ever came to anything! There was still that escape from this perplexing matter; for whether I felt disposed to support his suit or not, it was still by no means certain, even when Mr. Reredos had finally declared himself, what Alice Harley might say.

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